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TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: IS FIDEL DONE?

Classified By: Michael E. Parmly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) International press reports have zeroed in on the last two sentences of a letter from Fidel Castro to the evening talk show Mesa Redonda (Round Table) that dealt mostly with the Bali conference on global warming as an indication that he has announced his intention to "give up power" in Cuba. While we believe Fidel included the sentences in this letter, and that the regime has made a clear effort to get maximum distribution of it, for a very specific purpose, we are not convinced that he is about to give up power.

¶2. (SBU) Our rendering of the final two sentences is as follows: "My basic duty is not to hold on to positions, nor much less to stand in the way of younger persons, but rather to contribute experiences and ideas whose modest value is derived from the exceptional period in which I have lived. I think that like (centenarian and Brazilian architect) Niemeyer one has to be consistent until the end."

¶3. (C) These phrases make no mention of giving up power. They do, however, suggest that Fidel may not emerge with the title of President when the newly "elected" National Assembly selects a new Council of State, probably in March. Indeed, his statement paves the way for someone else--likely brother Raul--to take on the formal title of President.

¶4. (C) There has been much speculation in Cuba for some time about how the "electoral" process would deal with Fidel in his debilitated condition. At first it was thought he might not be nominated for a seat in the National Assembly. However, when his nomination came through as usual (there are other historic figures of the revolution too aged or infirm to participate actively who also were nominated), speculation shifted to what would happen if he were elected President as usual. Would Raul have to be named "provisional" president (a position not contemplated under the Cuban constitution) again? What would the reaction be if Fidel Castro were not elected President (highly improbable, but a technical possibility)? With Fidel's statement, the National Assembly will now be free to choose another as president. Assuming that individual is Raul, he will then be able to remove the word "provisional" from his title. Such a change would not be important in the short term, but could help Raul consolidate power when Fidel does die.

¶5. (C) However, even if Raul is selected as President, we do not see him as able to exercise presidential powers in the same manner as his brother, as long as the latter remains alive. It is especially noteworthy that Fidel opted to refer to Niemeyer, who has remained active into his 100th year.

Whether he holds the title of President or not, Fidel will continue to make his views clear publicly through his "Reflections" columns, and will no doubt continue to wield significant power behind the scenes, especially in decisions related to foreign policy and economic reform.

¶6. (C) While it will be noteworthy, and indeed historic, if and when Fidel loses the title of President as part of this process, it is not likely to alter the status quo in any significant way.

PARMLY